

August 4, 1961

Copy of handwritten letter.

Dear Boss,

I have just finished a job which I volunteered to do for Dean Rusk and am now going -- in the current jargon -- "to phase out" for a while. To work for this crowd is strangely depressing. Nothing seems to get decided. The job just finished was to get up a program of international political action -- negotiation with its public opening, fall back, and very private positions on Berlin and Germany, together with a propaganda campaign. The State Dept. has all sorts of suggestions but no definitive recommendations. This Rusk now has and I have bullied him into giving the President a copy. But I cannot get them to decide on this -- or anything else -- as our program to present to our allies. Rusk wants to approach everything piecemeal. But how you lead anyone unless you first know where you yourself want to go, I do not know.

I am told that the President wants to talk with me. But the man he ought to talk with is his Secretary of (a curious ship) State; and he ought to demand a written program of action which he could approve, change or disapprove. Instead of this everything is kept nebulous. This is a good way to drift into trouble wholly unprepared. What is the new word? Disenchanted. I am becoming disenchanted.

So Alice and I are getting out of town. Our daughters are both going to be on Martha's Vineyard for the last half of August and we have decided to be with them but at the other end of the island so as not to be breathing down their necks. In the autumn we might go abroad. The Chancellor wants me to come to Bonn and I would like to see the Bruces and other friends in England. Finally it just might be possible to get both Salazar and Kennedy to make a little more sense about Angola. We are about to alienate a most essential ally by our silly attitude in the U.N.; and our ally is about to go bankrupt trying to suppress an uprising which it probably can't suppress. I think that we could help by trying to quiet things down on the basis of more participation in government by the blacks and economic development in both Portugal and Angola. This means some give by Salazar and a silencer on Soapy and Aolai.

But over all of this hangs Berlin. I don't want to be abroad if I have to defend action of which I do not approve. I do not agree with an alleged remark of yours that Mr. K is bluffing. He has, I believe, sensed weakness and division in the West and intends to exploit it to the hilt. It wouldn't take more than an error to two on each side to carry us over the edge into nuclear war. Or we could panic into an abject acceptance of K's terms. "We" includes our allies. Last weekend I had over seven hours with Joseph (Frantz Joseph, to be correct) Strauss. It was not reassuring. Not that he was ready to quit, but rather he just hadn't thought the crisis through and was full of fears at one moment and utterly extravagant expectations of our nuclear power. In my judgment we shall have to run grave danger of war by preparations for ground action -- in which most soldiers (Max Taylor excepted) to not believe -- to convince K that by pressing too far he might force us into a nuclear response. Only in this way do I think that he can be brought to a truly sensible and tolerable negotiating state of mind.

With affectionate greetings.

/s/

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